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Access to Juvenile Court Records— SB375
Testimony before the Senate Committee on Judiciary,
Corrections, Insurance, Campaign Finance Reform, and
Housing
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Thank you members of the Committee for hearing Senate Bill 375 today.

This bill is the result of many discussions and compromises made to legislation that was introduced last session. I would like to thank Senators Sullivan, Senator Taylor, Representative Grigsby, and the Department of Children's and Families (DCF) for helping rework this bill.

Currently, when child protective service social workers are in the process of placing a removed child, they conduct a detailed criminal background check of the residents of the placement home. This includes contacting the courts to gain access to adult and juvenile court records of those living in the placement home.

Social workers need access to the juvenile court records to verify a proposed caregiver has no history of abuse or neglect proceedings and that any other children residing in that home do not have any allegations of sexual assault at the time of placement.

However, situations arise where placement needs to occur outside of normal business hours. During these emergency placements, child protective service social workers have no way to access juvenile court records since the courts are closed. This severely hampers their ability to make informed decisions about intake investigations of child abuse and neglect referrals in Wisconsin, particularly in Milwaukee County, where child welfare is administered by the state.

This bill addresses this issue by allowing the Director of Courts to enter into an agreement with DCF to allow the transfer of electronic records from CCAP (Adults) and SACWIS (Child) to DCF. The intent of the agreement is to have this information only accessible, as needed, by social workers during an emergency placement when the courts are closed.

In order to protect against unauthorized access of these records, the bill requires that the agreement contain a provision that information transferred can only be used for purposes of providing transfers of children and that the information be kept confidential. Violation of confidentiality under this agreement carries up to a \$5,000 fine.

I'm sure each of you agrees that it would be unthinkable to remove a child from their home under the guise of protective placement and then place that child in a home where that abuse may continue due to incomplete information provided to child protective service social workers. We must give these workers access to information they need to protect these already abused and vulnerable children.

Thank you again for hearing this bill and I encourage your support for Senate Bill 375 as it makes its way through this committee and again when it comes for a vote before the full Senate.